



A Sensitive Portrayal of the Conflict Between Man and Nature: An Eco-Critical Reading of Na D'Souza's Novella Dweepa

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Abstract

The escalating precarity of Earth's ecological balance in recent decades constitutes a paramount global concern, impacting all nations and the very existence of humankind. Eco-criticism investigates ecological and environmental issues through cultural, sociological, historical, and political lenses. This paper focuses on the severe ecological damages in India, caused by rapid but lopsided economic development over the past half-century. Through an eco-critical reading of Dweepa, a novella by Norbert D'Souza, it throws light on the profound human sufferings caused by the construction of Linganamakki Dam built on Sharavathi River in the Shivamogga district of Karnataka. Accredited as the first displacement novel in Kannada, it poignantly portrays the devastating ramifications of dam construction leading to submerging of about two hundred villages. The author laments the submersion of lush fields, hillocks covered by verdant vegetation and loss of rich flora and fauna as well as the traditional peaceful lives of the displaced villagers. This paper examines the intricate relationship between humans and nature and the far reaching consequences of selfish anthropocentric exploitation of the natural sources. Furthermore, it highlights the irreversible damage to ecosystem resulting from large scale developmental projects in the form of inundation of numerous hills and vast evergreen forests and alteration of a river course. It draws critical attention of the society to the detrimental impact of development on the human population and wild life of surrounding area as well. Thousands of people were forced to relocate and struggle desperately to survive in a new hostile environment. It seeks to find alternate approaches to implementation of such projects which would prioritize the well being of the marginalised communities and protection of the environment

Keywords: Linganamakki dam, Eco-criticism, ecological balance, submerging

1. Introduction

The ecological balance of earth has reached a precarious state in recent decades and it is the single most important issue affecting not only all countries but the very future of mankind, nay all forms of life on this planet. This situation has prompted the scholars and academicians to examine human's relationship with nature and its impact on the earth. While the origin of environmental movement can be traced back to the 1960s with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, it gained momentum only in the 1990s. William Rueckert (1978) coined the term "Ecocriticism" in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" which

elaborates its goal "to find the grounds upon which the two communities-the human, the natural-can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere" (p. 107). Eco-criticism has been established as an interdisciplinary field of study examining the intersection of literature and environment in recent times. It investigates ecological and environmental issues from cultural, sociological, historical, political, and other perspectives. It brings into its ambit not just written texts but all art forms such as paintings, sculptures, documentaries, cinema and so on. Many eco-critics Lawrence Buell, Clark, Dana Philips, Greg Garrards etc. have expanded the boundaries of



this domain by adding many new perspectives. [1]

1.1. Background

In India, rapid but lopsided economic development over the past half-century has severely damaged the ecology. A dramatic increase in population, coupled with a lack of public awareness, governmental apathy, and greed of the industrialist are among many factors leading to the alarming environmental deterioration in current times. Many activists like Ramdeo Misra, Sandeep Kumar Mishra, Vandana shiva etc., have raised their concerns about the ecological issues in India. Dweepa, a novella, based on the construction of the Linganamakki dam across the Sharavathi River in Karnataka, which submerged around 200 villages, delves into the complex consequences and ramifications of 'progress'. Over decades several hydroelectrical projects and reservoirs built on the basin of the Sharavathi river have led to the inundation of about 6 kilometers of tropical evergreen forest. The dam has brought economic development and progress to the Sagara and other neighbouring districts no doubt, but it has displaced 12000 people causing their loss of home, land and livelihood. The novella, depicts the socio-economic and psychological impact of developmental projects, like the expansion of road, laying of railway track or construction of a dam, on the lives of common people especially the underprivileged. [2]

2. Literature Review

Few researches have examined Dweepa by Na D'Souza from various perspectives. B. Santhi Sree and N. Usha in their article titled "Submersion of Soil: An Ecocritical Reading of Land in Na d' Souza's Dweepa" criticises the manner in which government projects like construction of Lingannmakki dam completely devastated the old peaceful lives of hundreds of farmers forcing them to relocate. The article "Dams, Development and disposability: Eco-anxiety, Precarity, and submerging voices in Na D' Souza's Dweepa" by Gautam Karmakar showcases how the large developmental projects represent the consumerist perspective of a capitalistic society where the voices

of marginalised is lost in greater narrative of progress. It delves into the dehumanization that happens in the dam construction and its negative impact on both human beings and eco-systems. While "A Study Of Displacement And Injustice In Norbert D'Souza's Dweepa" by Dr. M. Angkayarkan Vinayakaselviah and R.Abinaya highlighted untold miseries of people at the lowest rung of society due to the dam construction.

2.1. Objectives

This article examines Dweepa, written by Na D'Souza, from an eco-critical perspective:

- Presenting the destruction of forests and eco-system and disruption in nature caused by human unleashed in the name of progress.
- Analyzes the multifaceted problems and hardships faced by these displaced communities.
- Highlights the eternal clash between humans and nature, - the destructive power of nature is represented by Sharavathi river and the relentless monsoon and the insignificance of human in the face of nature's fury.

3. Research Method

Qualitative research uses data collected through interviews, observations and document analysis. Fiction-based research method, propounded by Patricia Leavy, an American Sociologist, is an extension of qualitative research methodology which uses a novel or a short story or any literary text or multiple texts as the data examining them to find representation of some theoretical framework. The novels or any other literary text or texts are considered valid material for research as they present real life scenarios and problems. This article has employed fiction-based research method to probe Dweepa, a novella. [3]

4. Author's Profile

Norbert D'Souza, popularly known as Na D'Souza, is a prominent Kannada writer and activist who has sought to foster environmental consciousness among people through his art. Many of his novels explore the clash between man and the nature and its positive



and negative impact on the society. Having worked in PWD department of 37 years, he had the firsthand knowledge of the toll the developmental projects like construction of dams, roads, railways etc. had on the local ecology. A prolific writer, he wrote more than 40 novels and several short stories in Kannada. Dweepa and Kadina Benki were adapted into awards winning movies. Many of his works were translated into English. He was awarded Sahitya Academy's Bala Sahitya Puraskar for his children's novel Mulugadeya Oorige Bandavaru. [4]

5. Analysis of the Text

The narrative focuses on a small village, Hosamanehalli, situated on the banks of Sharavathi and nestled under the foot of a hillock named Sita Parvatha. The lands of this village and numerous other villages were acquired for the construction of the dam. The government provided monetary compensation and land in some other village to the landowners. The landless farmers, who worked in the land of rich landlords, did not receive any compensation. Santhi Sree and N.Usha (2024) opine, "Dweepa serves as a lens through which we can discern the detrimental effects of displacement and modernization on underprivileged communities positioned at the lower echelons of India's social hierarchy" (p.108). The novella brings out the pathetic condition of the farmers whose lives have been irrevocably altered ever since the construction of dam started. Hosamanehalli has only five families engaged in the last battle with the nature in the form of the river Sharavathi and the fury of monsoon. The construction of dam has been going on for a couple of years. Majority of the villagers have relocated to new land, but some lingered on in their ancestral land. The prospect of leaving their ancestral land and starting fresh in a new place looms large over their lives which is by no means easy or comfortable. The slow process of assessment of land and disbursement of the compensation made the lives of farmers miserable. Bureaucratic red tape and rampant corruption among the officials added to their woes. Parameshwarayya, Herambha Hegde and Ganapayya and the other landowner have received

notices to vacate their lands. With the completion of dam three years away, they had stayed on and continued to farm rice crop and areca nuts. The previous year had passed without any major incidents. But this year they have been warned that the monsoon would bring heavy rain causing the river to deluge. The river Sharavathi, a narrow and shallow rivulet in the summer, transforms into a raging sea swelling with rain water flowing in from all directions during monsoon. "Sharavathi had never come close to Hosamanehalli though she would roar ferociously from a distance during the monsoon. But now she was thinking of swallowing it up" (D'Souza, 2013, p.34). Parameshwarayya and Herambha Hegde have been granted compensation as they have greased the hands of officials. Ganapayya who could not offer sufficient bribe, has not received any compensation in spite of making several rounds of the office. In fact, the clerk claims that his file is lost. Ganapayya vents out his frustration at a senior official who promises to help him. Parameshwarayya had left as soon as he received compensation. Now Hegde decides to leave the village, having received compensation, ready to forgo the profit he might make from the crop. "I'll have to move from here today or tomorrow, anyway. Why should I stay on and strain myself through the monsoon, craving to read a profit from harvesting areca nut and paddy? Who knows how high the water will rise this year? (p.10)" Duggajja, Ganapayya's father, has spent his entire life toiling in the two acres of land he owned. He wants to continue living in Hosamanehalli as long as possible. He embodies the attachment that all farmers have to their farm land. "Every time there was a talk of having to leave Hosamanehalli, he felt weak in the legs and sank to the floor. He loved his piece of land with an attachment a woman feels for her mother's house. He was determined he would not leave her if he could help" (p.12). Later, he dies of sickness during the monsoon season in his native village. The cessation of rain for his funeral seems to symbolize nature's respect for one who truly loved it. Ganapayya, who shares the sentiments of his father, declares, "Even if the government



compensates me with land and money right now, I am not the kind who'll get up and go immediately. I'm going to stay here this monsoon and reap the harvest on my land. Let whatever happens happen" (p.13). However, it proves to be a difficult task, as he and his young wife Nagaveni are the only residents in the village. They try to get farm labourers from neighbouring village but do not succeed. Krishnayya, a sprightly young man, is brought in to assist in the farm. An orphan raised by Nagaveni's father, Krishnayya and Nagaveni harbored romantic feelings for each other before her marriage, though they suppressed these desires due to familial disapproval. His arrival in Hosamanehalli rekindles the sparks of suppressed desires causing tension among the three. The four months of monsoon are critical for Ganappayya and his family. As the monsoon sets in, incessant rain begins frequently accompanied by the howling of wind and rumbles of thunder which are the grim reminders of the imminent threat of flood. Soon Sharavathi river overflows its banks inundating the lands of Parameshwarayya and Herambha and threatening to engulf Ganappayya's land soon. Cut off from the other villages, Hosamanehalli is marooned completely, becoming a 'dweepa' which means an island. The Sharavathi was swelling by the moment..... Water had encircled Sita Parvatha. From a distance Hosamanehalli looked like an island, like an insignificant rock in the sea, a helpless piece of land surrounded by a watery girdle with no contact with the outside world. (D'Souza, 2013, p.48). The raging storm outside mirrors the inner turmoil within Ganapayya, Nagaveni, and Krishnayya. Their physical isolation, current dangerous condition and ceaseless rain weigh down on all the three characters. Ganapayya's existential problem is further accentuated by the growing rift with his wife. Noticing a marked change in Nagaveni's behaviour, he asserts his authority by beating her and forbidding her to speak to Krishnayya. Krishnayya is in a dilemma himself being torn between his love and his reluctance to break Nagaveni's marriage. He wants to leave Hosamanehalli but is unable to do so because

of the heavy rain and flooding of the river. While heavy rain was a common occurrence in the village, the excess rain water flowing into Sharavathi would cause it to overflow the banks, but it would retreat back to its position after the rain. Now the dam wall has risen to ten feet blocking the natural path of the river. "But now that her flow was blocked further down, she had begun to spread out, encroaching the neighbouring forest and valley. Trees, shrubs and bamboos were already knee-deep in rainwater, in red muddy water, still and silent"(p.45). Incessant rain and rising water of Sharavathi are not the only threats. A host of wild animals from Malenadu, the nearby forest encroaches upon the farmland and the village in search of food and shelter. At night the howling of wild animals and even the low growls of tiger are heard striking terror in the hearts of residents. Some of their domesticated animals fall prey to the wild animals. Ganapayya fears that the predators might attack their hut itself. Krishnayya ventures out and climbs Sita Parvatha to assess the situation. Vast stretches of farmland and surrounding forests are submerged, leaving nothing but water in every direction. The bloated carcasses of dead animals, such as rabbits and deer, float in the water. The fury of the rain and storm have wreaked havoc not only in the village but neighbouring forests also. Right in front was what looked like the sea, a sea of muddy water. There was water everywhere, where ever he looked, to his right, to his left... Floating in the water were hillocks like tiny island. These were the remnants of huge hills that the water had swallowed up leaving only the crest. (D'Souza, 2013, p.79) When the rain stops briefly, Krishnayya leaves the hut planning to return to his own village. However, Nagaveni, resolute in her love for Krishnayya, follows him. Krishnayya begins to swim to the opposite shore braving the tumultuous current. Nagaveni calls out to him from the shore repeatedly. When Krishnayya does not turn back, she jumps into the river. Hearing her cries, Krishnayya turns back and attempts to save Nagaveni. The roaring river engulfs both of them and continues its flow indifferent to their deaths. Ganapayya, a witness to



their dreadful end, is also killed by a prowling tiger. The tragic end of Ganapayya and his family is a minor incident in the vast canvass of economic development of the nation, forgotten completely like the submerged villages. The nature and life in the society goes on unaffected. Water from the Sharavathi continued to girdle the land. The wind from Sita Parvatha continued to blows it always did during the monsoon. And as the Alesha rain poured as usual without stopping for breath. (D'Souza,2013, p.90)

Conclusion

Thus, Na D'Souza's Dweepa is a poignant portrayal of the eternal struggle between human and the nature. It is a powerful commentary on the detrimental effect of human interference with the natural world symbolized by the construction of dam and subsequent submersion of countless villages and forest. The novella presents two paradoxical scenarios. On the one hand, the dam represents the triumph of human intellect and its ability to control nature. On the other, the narrative reveals nature's overwhelming power, manifested in the relentless rain and the Sharavathi River's devastating floods, against which mankind is utterly helpless. Such events serve as a grim reminder to the mankind that the nature is not a plaything to be manipulated. Its resources are not the sole properties of man, but a treasure he shares with all other living beings. Pankaj Sekhsaria (2017), a prominent environmental activist and author, emphasizes that planet's basic life support system has been harmed by man's interference with nature. Ecocriticism plays a vital role in reminding humanity of its true place and role on this planet. All living beings—plants, animals, and indigenous communities—are essential components of Earth's ecosystem and possess inherent rights to exist and flourish. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) rightly affirms "ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies," rather than an anthropomorphic or human-centered approach (p. xviii). Sustainable growth depends on the judicious use of natural resources, careful maintenance of environment, curbing excessive consumerism, and

concerted efforts to restore ecological balance.

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996, p.214)

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